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National report submitted pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 5/1 and 16/21*

Lao People's Democratic Republic

* The present document is being issued without formal editing.

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I. Process of preparation of the national report

1. The National Report for the 4th Cycle UPR of UNHRC was prepared by the Drafting Committee, comprising representatives and human rights focal points from relevant ministries and agencies, coordinated by the Department of Treaty and Law, MOFA, serving as the NCHR Secretariat. The Report follows the UNHRC's Guidance Note and its Resolutions (A/HRC/RES/16/21 and A/HRC/RES/17/119), as well as the OHCHR's addenda on preparing national reports under the 4th Cycle UPR.

2. The information used in this Report is based on data and statistics provided by ministries, NA, PSC, SPP, and other government agencies at both central and local levels. The Report highlights efforts, achievements, and challenges in the promotion and protection of human rights since the 3rd Cycle UPR.

3. The Drafting Committee organized a total of 10 workshops and consultations with the participation of both central and local authorities, as well as with educational and research institutions, CSOs, development partners, including UN agencies, other international organizations, and INGOs active in Lao PDR.

II. Key developments related to the promotion and protection of human rights in Lao PDR since 3rd cycle UPR

4. The Lao Government accepted 160 recommendations out of 226 recommendations from 89 UN member states during the 3rd Cycle UPR in 2020. The NCHR coordinated by the MOFA in working closely with the concerned ministries and agencies engaged in creating the POA which was adopted by the Lao Government in 2022. In addition to implementing specific UPR recommendations accepted by Lao PDR, the POA aligns with and supports the implementation of the 9th NSEDP (2021-2025), as well as sectoral priorities, plans, and programs. The POA was published and widely disseminated to ministries, NA, Provincial People's Assemblies, PSC, SPP, LFND, mass organizations, educational and research institutions, and CSOs.

5. Following the 3rd Cycle UPR, key developments in the political life of Lao PDR took place, significantly the XI Congress of the LPRP, the elections of the NA 9th Legislature, and of Provincial People's Assemblies held in 2021. Notably, the XI Party Congress elected the LPRP Central Executive Committee with 71 full members (12 women) and 10 alternate members (2 women). The LPRP Central Executive Committee has also elected 13 Politburo Members (2 women), and 5 Members of the Secretariat (2 women). The XI Congress set the guidance and direction for national socio-economic development, graduation from LDC status, and implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The NA 9th Legislature has 164 members (36 women or 21.95%), and Provincial People's Assemblies have 492 members (150 women or 30.48%).

6. Currently, Lao PDR is in the process of amending the 2015 Constitution to improve the efficiency of the State management, establish a new direction for national safeguarding and development, strengthen economic integration at international and regional levels. This initiative also aims to enhance and promote the People's Democracy and the Rule of Law, the right of the Lao multi-ethnic people to self-determination, national ownership and mastery of their own country, where human rights and fundamental rights of the people are fully guaranteed. Nationwide consultations are organized, participated by civil servants, representatives of educational and research institutions, social organizations, and the private sector. The consultation process also encourages broad public participation through channels, such as Email specifically created by the National Committee for Constitutional Amendments and the NA's website.

7. Lao PDR translates human rights obligations and commitments into policies, legislative, judicial, administrative, and other concrete measures, aiming to create and enhance conducive conditions for Lao people to fully enjoy their political, civil, economic, social, and cultural rights. Since 2021-2024, the NA has adopted 73 laws (19 new, 54

amended). In addition, the Government has adopted numerous sub-laws that are related to human rights promotion and protection.

8. Lao PDR has been affected by the enduring impact of COVID-19, the global economic and financial difficulties and frequent natural disasters. The Lao economy is now on track to recover with positive developments have been recorded. At the same time, Lao PDR has enjoyed peace and security, maintained political stability and public order that allows the Lao multi-ethnic people to exercise their human rights, improving their living standards.

9. Since 2021 the Government has been implementing two National Agendas: one on economic and financial difficulties and another on drug issues. The country achieved a GDP growth rate averaging 4.03% from 2021 to 2023, with rates of 3.5% in 2021, 4.4% in 2022, 4.5% in 2023, and 4.6% in 2024 accordingly. Thanks to the efforts concerted to implement the national Agenda on addressing economic and financial difficulties, the high inflations have reduced from 24.4% in December 2023 to 16% in December 2024; The exchange rate has stabilized; foreign reserves can guarantee imports for 5.2 months. The key factors driving GDP growth in 2024 include: a) the service sector attracted over 5 million domestic and international tourists, generating more than 1 billion US$ in revenue, exceeding the annual target (127%); b) the agriculture, processing, and construction sectors, including food production, reached 3,185.10 billion LAK, or 74.66% of the annual plan; and mining production achieved over 34,000 billion LAK, exceeding the annual plan by 127.52%; c) foreign trade, with a total value of 13,798.33 million US$, or 86.19% of the annual plan (16,010.09 million US$), including 7,314.85 million US$ in exports, or 83.84% of the annual plan (8,724.33 million US$), and 6,483.48 million US$ in imports, or 88.99% of the annual plan (7,285.76 million US$), with agricultural product exports alone surpassing 1 billion US$, achieving 86.94% of the annual target.

III. Implementation of accepted recommendations of 3rd cycle UPR

A. Rule of law and good governance, political and civil rights

1. Rule of law and good governance (Recommendations 115.85, 86, 87, 88, 89)

10. Lao PDR pays attention to improving good governance and public administration by advancing digital technology systems using open-source software to improve efficiency, transparency, and data security. The Government also encourages participation from individuals, legal entities, and organizations in developing and implementing digital public services.

11. During the COVID-19 pandemic, despite disruptions, the Government continued modernizing the law-making process, utilizing G-Share/G-Drive for document storage and G-Chat for remote coordination and consultation meetings. Strict measures were applied for physical meetings to prevent COVID-19 spread.

12. The President of Lao PDR issued the Presidential Decree on Administrative Procedure (2021), ensuring that Judges base their decisions solely on the law. Since 2020, the PSC and SPP have conducted trainings as part of capacity building for enhancing judicial independence and impartiality.

13. Under the Law on Handling of Petitions (2022), individuals, legal entities, or organizations have the right to file complaints for resolution to ministries/agencies concerned (request), to the People's Procuracy and the People's Courts (lawsuit) and to the NA (petition for justice).

14. The Government prioritizes access to justice for all, offering free legal aid to vulnerable people. Legal aid is provided by provincial and Vientiane capital Bar Associations, District Bar units, and voluntary pro bono or reduced-fee legal services. The establishment of the Lawyers Training Center under the Lao Bar Association (LBA) aims to

strengthen legal practitioners' capacity. Certain CSOs also provide legal aid to women and children, victims of domestic violence and human trafficking.

15. The Government attaches importance to creating legal vigilance in society, employing various methods to raise awareness and ensure respect for the law. The target audience includes ordinary people, civil servants, defense and public security personnel, Buddhist monks and novices, as well as the priests of other religions, foreigners, and others, aiming to foster universal access to justice.

2. Right to Freedom of Opinion, Expression, Press, and Media (Recommendations 115.35, 36, 90, 92, 93, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 108)

16. Lao citizens enjoy the right to freedoms of opinion, speech, expression, and media in line with the Constitution, laws and international human rights obligations of Lao PDR. These freedoms may be subject to legitimate limitations under the Penal Code, Law on Media, Law on Information and Communication Technology, and other legislation that are strictly in line with the International Human Rights Law. The Government has amended the Law on Publications and issued the Guidelines for the responsible use of social media, ensuring access to information while regulating harmful online expressions like hate speech.

17. The Penal Code criminalizes harm caused through social media, including offenses such as unauthorized access to or modification of computer systems, distribution of obscene materials, and crimes through telecommunications systems; Defamation, slander, and abusive language are also criminalized.

18. The Government promotes media and publishing, emphasizing their role in disseminating information about the Lao culture and fine traditions. The media landscape in the country includes 116 types of print media, 11 daily newspapers, 168 radio stations, 49 television stations, 86 online news platforms, and 7,858 community radio stations.

19. Currently, Lao PDR has its own satellite communication (LAOSAT-1), and expanded its optical fiber network to 101,360 km, supported by 8,987 Base Transceiver Stations (BTS). The 2G network covers 98% of villages, while 3G and 4G networks cover 87% and 77%, respectively. There are 4,963,758 mobile phone subscriptions, out of which 4,624,070 are mobile internet standard subscription, and 1,233,787 landline subscriptions. Additionally, 18 interconnection points support cross-border telecommunications and internet connectivity.

3. Right to freedom of association and assembly (Recommendations 115.112, 115)

20. The Government has created a favorable environment for the establishment and operation of associations and foundations, ensuring their alignment with legal frameworks. The ongoing amending of Decree No. 238/GOV on Associations (2017) and Decree No. 149/PM on Foundations (2011) aims to be better responsive to current and emerging needs in the promotion of the role and participation of CSOs and Foundations in the national socio-economic development. In the Decrees' revision process, representatives of CSOs were duly consulted. They provided meaningful inputs for the improvement of these Decrees, addressing challenges faced and proposing viable solutions. The revision process is nearing completion and awaiting promulgation by the Government, expected to happen within 2025.

21. Currently, there are 324 Lao CSOs, consisting of 258 associations and 66 foundations. This represents an increase of 136 organizations (95 associations and 41 foundations) compared to the figures reported in the 3rd Cycle UPR in 2020, which recorded 188 organizations (163 associations and 25 foundations). These organizations engage in various activities, particularly environmental protection, rural and community development, education, law, culture, and promotion and protection of human rights and legitimate interests of vulnerable groups, including women, children, persons with disabilities, elderly persons. From 2021-2023, Lao CSOs have mobilized a combined amount of over 250 billion LAK for 575 projects focused on education, agriculture, climate change adaptation, environmental conservation, and COVID-19 impact mitigation. Meetings and exhibitions of the work of CSOs are organized annually demonstrating and highlighting the contributions of CSOs. Furthermore, Lao PDR pays attention to creating a more supportive environment for the operation of INGOs. The Government is in the process of revising Decree No. 013 to better

address the evolving needs. Currently, there are 145 INGOs operating in Lao PDR contributing to the national socio-economic development and poverty reduction.

4. Right to freedom of religion or belief (Recommendations 115.48, 116, 118)

22. Lao PDR is home to 50 ethnic groups, living harmoniously across the country. Ethnic groups in Laos have a strong sense of solidarity and non-discrimination; they have their own unique cultures and traditions while upholding the national culture. The Lao multi-ethnic people have the freedom of religion or belief; they have the right to believe or not to believe in religion. Lao PDR has transposed its international human rights obligations on freedom of religion into the Constitution and specific legislation. This national legal framework guarantees the freedom of religion or belief to all ethnic groups, ensuring the protection and equality of legally registered religious organizations and preventing coercion, intimidation or discrimination based on ethnicity or religion in accordance with Articles 9, 35, and 43 of the Constitution.

23. Lao PDR officially recognizes six religious organizations, representing four major religions such as Buddhism (68.29% of the population, with 5,309 temples and 26,392 monks), Christianity (2.72%, with 378 churches, 4,872 priests, and 2,101 nuns), the Bahá'í Faith (0.03%, with 3 temples and 13 Bahá'í teachers, including 8 women), and Islam (0.04%, with 2 mosques and 9 Islamic teachers), while 28.92% of Lao population practice ancestor worship.

24. Between 2020-2024, MOHA, in collaboration with the relevant authorities at the central and local levels, organized 49 workshops with a view to disseminating Decree 315/GOV on religious freedom, benefiting 2,685 participants from 78 villages in 41 districts. These workshops enhanced the awareness and understanding of the Decree among officials at central and local levels. The information sharing and better understanding of the Decree helped improve the coordination between the central and local authorities in promoting and protecting religious freedom in line with the Constitution and laws and the relevant international human rights obligations and commitments of Lao PDR.

5. Right to fair trial, protection against torture and arbitrary arrests, improvement of prison conditions and the guarantee of the rights of inmates (Recommendations 115.72, 80, 82, 83, 84)

25. Lao PDR has made progress in enhancing the rule of law and good governance, ensuring the right to a fair trial and due process of law. Article 35 of the Constitution guarantees equality before the law, regardless of gender, social status, education, belief, or ethnic group. The Law on People's Courts, Law on Civil Procedure, and Law on Criminal Procedure ensure equality in both criminal and civil proceedings, protecting the right and ability to contest and present evidence. Individuals are protected from coercion, threats, harm, or torture and are presumed innocent until proven guilty. Trials are public, and judges are independent, basing decisions solely on legal considerations. Unlawful arrest, detention, or imprisonment are criminal offenses under the Penal Code.

26. In terms of inspecting detention facilities, Lao PDR has established a coordination mechanism between MOPS and SPP to effectively monitor detention facilities and law enforcement. This mechanism ensures oversight of conditions of detention and rehabilitation centers and other facilities enforcing court sentences. Detention facility heads and officers must comply with orders from the chief people's prosecutors to strictly adhere to the laws and regulations concerning detention.

27. Lao PDR has implemented a humanitarian policy to improve conditions of detention facilities. Since the 3rd Cycle UPR, the Government has upgraded detention infrastructure and addressed overcrowding while offering programs such as sports, art performance, and vocational training in fields like carpentry, agriculture, and electrical work. These initiatives aim to equip inmates with skills for reintegration and sustainable careers upon release.

28. From 2020 to 2024, Lao PDR granted amnesties on the occasion of National Day to 2,052 prisoners (369 women), of whom 44 foreign nationals (5 women); and 9,244 prisoners (1,274 women) received sentence reductions, with 112 foreign nationals (22 women). During

the time of COVID-19, 1,542 prisoners (224 women) and 32 foreign nationals were released early.

6. Anti-trafficking in persons (Recommendations 115.119, 120, 121, 122, 123, 124, 125, 126, 127, 128)

29. Lao PDR pays attention to combating human trafficking. It has actively engaged in regional and international cooperation, becoming a state party to key international and regional treaties related to anti-human trafficking, including UNTOC, CEDAW, CRC, Palermo Protocols on trafficking in and smuggling of persons, several ILO conventions, and also ACTIP.

30. Lao PDR has Law on Anti-Human Trafficking since 2015. In 2023, Lao PDR has introduced Law on Employment and amended Law on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of Children. The National Action Plan on Combating Human Trafficking (2021-2025) is being implemented; several training and guidance manuals for victim protection, reintegration, investigations, and legal awareness have been created and disseminated.

31. The National Steering Committee on Human Trafficking, as well as provincial and district anti-human trafficking committees, have engaged in raising awareness of human trafficking, sensitizing the risks and dangers of human trafficking, disseminating the relevant laws and international obligations. Information is disseminated through various media, including radio, TV, and public outreach activities. Trainings for the media were held that helped enhance the media's role in raising awareness of human trafficking and its risks, while the concerned authorities provided training on the protection of women and children, strengthening child support networks at the village level.

32. Since 2020, Lao PDR has prosecuted 178 human trafficking cases with 495 defendants, including 111 foreigners, and identified and provided assistance to 474 victims (403 women). The People's Prosecutors have submitted 55 cases to the People's Courts for adjudication, and People's Courts have rendered judgments in 26 cases, involving 42 defendants, including 5 foreigners.

33. Lao PDR attaches importance to bilateral cooperation with neighboring countries, including Cambodia, China, Thailand and Vietnam in fighting human trafficking and other forms of transnational crime, particularly through the conclusion of Memorandums of Understanding and the conduct of consultations to enhance coordination. The country also engages in regional frameworks such as ASEAN, the Bali Process, and COMMIT Process and cooperates with other countries and international organizations in combating human trafficking.

B. Economic and social rights, poverty alleviation, environment, and development

1. Socio-economic development, poverty alleviation to promote the economic, social and cultural rights, the rights to clean environment and sustainable development (Recommendations 115.58, 130, 131, 132, 133, 134, 135, 136, 137, 138, 139, 140, 141, 142, 143, 146, 147)

Socio-economic development, and poverty alleviation

34. Lao PDR has enhanced its efforts to graduate from LDC status by implementing the 9th NSEDP (2021-2025), the National Green Growth Strategy by 2030, the 2030 Agenda and SDGs, as well as other national strategies. The 9th NSEDP sets development targets and addresses economic challenges with a focus on human resource development, regulatory reforms, and poverty alleviation, among others. It also integrates Vision 2030 for sustainable development and socio-economic progress, aiming for the Lao PDR to reach middle-income status in the future. In November 2023, the NA endorsed the mid-term review of the plan and set priorities for 2023–2024.

35. To address poverty and development disparity in Lao PDR, the 9th NSEDP focuses on enhancing the well-being of the people, targeting poverty alleviation, and ensuring

sustainable living conditions and social protection for vulnerable groups, especially poor people. As of July 2024, 88.17% of the 1,399,904 families in Lao PDR have been assessed, with 79.12% graduated from poverty. Of the 8,402 villages, 64.72% have graduated from poverty, and 63 districts (43.44%) have moved out of poverty. Efforts also include upgrading 25 large villages to towns.

36. Poverty reduction efforts have been implemented through the Poverty Reduction Fund-3 (PRF-3), funded by a US$22.5 million World Bank loan, targeting 468 poor villages in four provinces, shifting from small-scale infrastructure to livelihood support related to nutritional promotion. The initiative has received 67.47 billion kip to fund 2,019 mutual aid groups or village saving groups with 26,591 members, and 462 small-scale infrastructure sub-projects were implemented. Furthermore, 530 Nutrition Groups were established with 38,000 members, receiving 4.7 billion kip in funding. These efforts, which include significant community contributions, aim to strengthen local capacities and alleviate poverty.

Graduation from Least Developed Country (LDC)

37. Lao PDR is moving towards the graduation from LDC. The UN General Assembly adopted a resolution to this effect in November 2021. In 2024, the UN Committee for Development Policy confirmed that Lao PDR largely fulfilled the three LDC graduation criteria: GNI per capita of US$2,503, HAI of 74.8, and EVI of 29.8. In 2023, the Government approved the Smooth Transition Strategy, developed in collaboration with UN agencies and partners, to ensure a smooth, quality and sustainable graduation. Faced with the current global economic and financial difficulties and other challenges, Lao PDR recognizes the need for additional assessment of its preparedness for LDC graduation and for further international support to its national socio-economic development and the realization of SDGs.

2. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Recommendations 115.53, 55)

38. Lao PDR has integrated the SDGs into the 9th NSEDP, covering 46 SDG indicators. Notable progress includes SDG 3 (Ensure good health), with reduced maternal mortality; SDG 4 (Ensure quality, equity, and inclusive education), achieving a 93.1% primary school completion rate; and SDG 5 (Gender equality) through the National Action Plan for Gender Equality, National Action Plan for Mothers and Children, and National Action Plan on the Prevention and Elimination of Violence Against Women and Children 2021-2025. SDG 7 (Ensure access to modern energy) saw 95.88% of households gaining electricity access in 2023. However, challenges remain with SDG 18 (UXO clearance) and other SDGs due to the Government's budget constraints and inadequate international assistance. In 2024, Lao PDR submitted its 3rd Voluntary National Report (VNR) on SDG progress, detailing successes and obstacles for the realization of the SDGs.

3. Right to development (Recommendations 115.150, 151, 152, 153)

39. The right to development is of paramount importance to the Lao PDR, which is still being impacted by war remnants, particularly UXOs that continue to pose huge obstacles to national development and poverty reduction. Nevertheless, with the appropriate periodic national socio-economic development plans, including the 9th NSEDP implemented thus far, coupled with the continued support from development partners, Lao PDR has attained important achievements in national development and poverty reduction.

40. Key investment projects have been initiated and are being implemented, including hydropower projects to produce clean and sustainable energy and the development of infrastructure in the realization of the Government's ambitious policy of transforming from a landlocked to landlinked country, promoting regional connectivity. The Laos-China Railway, which started operation about 3 years ago significantly contributes to the national economic and tourist development, facilitating regional connectivity. Private investments, including FDIs, play an important part in national socio-economic development as per the 9th NSEDP and are expected to be further mobilized as a crucial part of the 10th NSEDP which is currently under drafting. The Government recognizes the importance of responsible behavior of investors and businesses by adhering to the laws and regulations and the international standards on business and human rights. Investors, for example, must strictly comply with laws like the Laws on Investment, Land, Environmental Protection, and

Resettlement and Vocation, and Decree on Environmental Impact Assessment and other related legislation to ensure human rights and people's participation. Development projects, that affect the people, are required to have plans for resettlement, infrastructure development, improved living conditions, healthcare, education, and fair compensation for affected people. The approval of large-scale investment projects in Lao PDR have to follow relevant laws and regulations. As per the law, the Government forms a specific committee represented by relevant central and local authorities to conduct environmental, social and natural impact assessments before approval of a development/investment project. The committee engages the affected communities through public consultations, ensuring transparency and fairness. When relocation is required, the investors provide new housing and compensation according to the law, improving living conditions of the affected people that includes access to electricity, clean water, education, healthcare, and sustainable employment. The committee also monitors project implementation to ensure justice and address concerns.

41. Lao PDR implements the Master Plan on the National Land Allocation by 2030, which sets targets for land use to ensure food security, preserving 4.5 million hectares of agricultural land (19% of the total area), 2 million hectares of paddy land (8.4% of the total area), and 70% of the total area as forest covering. The Master Plan has been implemented to support effective management of natural resources and sustainable environment.

42. Lao PDR recognizes land traditionally used by local communities, ensures due compensation in accordance with the law. Compensation may include land replacement, in-kind support, or monetary reimbursement for land, buildings, crops, livestock, and income, calculated at replacement value. Resettlement involves relocating individuals to specifically built new housing approved by the majority of the affected. People's participation is guaranteed through the use of various means, including hotlines (e.g., MONRE's 1514), public opinion boxes, and digital platforms like Facebook, email, and YouTube.

4. Corporate social responsibility related to climate change, environmental protection (Recommendations 115.49, 50, 51, 52)

43. Lao PDR continues to mitigate global warming and the impacts of climate change on health, lives, property, infrastructure, and environment. These efforts include enforcing the Law on Environmental Protection and the Law on Disaster Management, alongside key decrees such as Decree No. 239/PM (2020) on the Disaster Management Committee and Decree on the National Environment Committee whose tasks also cover climate change. Strategic frameworks like the Natural Resources and Environment Sector Strategy (2030), SDGs, the National Green Growth Strategy, and the 2023 National Climate Change Strategy support the review and implementation of the 2nd National Climate Change Contribution Plan (NDC2), introduced in 2021.

44. Lao PDR is party to the UNFCCC and contributes to global climate change-fighting efforts. The country set targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions under two scenarios: unconditional mitigation and conditional mitigation. The 2030 targets under the conditional mitigation scenario align with the goal of achieving net-zero emissions by 2050.

45. Lao PDR has prioritized reducing greenhouse gas emissions and enhancing resilience to climate change in line with the Paris Agreement's goal to limit global temperature rise to well below 2°C, aiming for 1.5°C. The Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC 2021) aligns with the relevant SDGs integrated into the 9th NSEDP, focusing on climate change mitigation. The NDC 2021 also includes programs to strengthen health personnel capacity, targeting vulnerable groups, particularly women, children, persons with disabilities, ethnic groups, and elderly people.

46. Lao PDR adopted the National Strategy on Disaster Risk Reduction (NSDRR) for 2021-2030 outlining seven key approaches: 1) Strengthening the disaster prevention system, risk reduction, preparedness, and response; 2) Enhancing disaster response and emergency assistance; 3) Improving post-disaster recovery; 4) Fostering sectoral coordination on disaster risk reduction (DRR), emergency response, and recovery; 5) Advancing DRR education and training at national and local levels; 6) Promoting participation, stakeholder engagement, and inclusion; and 7) Securing adequate budgeting and financing for disaster risk management. The MOLSW is responsible for providing emergency assistance to

disaster-affected populations. Measures to strengthen disaster prevention and reduction include the establishment of 53 disaster risk management funds (1 central fund and 9 provincial funds), achieving 50% of the five-year target, and the creation of 43 district-level funds, meeting 76.79% of the target. Additionally, the Government has enhanced disaster risk management committees at various levels, with 145 district committees, 2,139 village committees, and 2,681 total members (525 women). National and local disaster preparedness and response plans have been developed, with disaster risk reduction strategies in two provinces and response plans in 15 provinces, 93 districts, and 49 villages. Training for national emergency response teams has benefitted 22 central-level and 75 provincial-level members. The Government, in collaboration with stakeholders, has assessed the damages and identified recovery needs in 16 provinces, 65 districts, and 1,339 villages. The estimated budget for recovery efforts stands at 552 billion LAK.

47. Lao PDR has adopted the Vision 2040 and National Strategy on Water Management, Use, and Water Resources for 2030 aiming to develop essential infrastructure for water use, and to address the challenges posed by climate change while ensuring the well-being and health of the people. A particular focus is placed on providing access to clean, adequate, and affordable water for all.

5. Right to health (Recommendations 115.58, 145, 148, 154, 155, 156, 157, 158, 159, 160, 161, 162, 163, 164, 165, 166, 167, 168, 169, 170, 171, 172, 173, 174, 175, 176)

48. Since 2021, Lao PDR has adopted 7 health-related laws, including 3 new laws: Law on Health (2023), Law on Primary Health Care (2023) and Law on Natural Resources for Medicines (2024); and 4 amended laws: Law on Tobacco Control (2021), Law on the Prevention and Control of Communicable Diseases (2022), Law on Health Care (2023) and Law on HIV/AIDS Control and Prevention (2024). In addition, Lao PDR has enacted strategic plans, such as the Health Sector Reform Strategy 2021-2030 focus on maternal and child health, reducing mortality rates, and improving nutrition. The health service network expanded from 1,213 facilities in 2020 to 1,241 in 2022, reaching both urban and rural areas. Public health outreach has been supported by the Centre for Communication and Education on Health. Mortality rates for children under one and under five improved to 6.77/1,000 and 7.81/1,000 live births, respectively, in 2024. Maternal mortality rate decreased to 36.2/100,000 live births, and birth attendance rose rate to 85.1% in 2023. Underweight and under-height child rates for children under five are 24.3% and 32.8%, respectively.

49. Lao PDR prioritizes reducing maternal and child mortality through the implementation of the National Strategy and Action Plan on Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child, and Adolescent Health (RMNCAH) 2021-2025. The National RMNCAH Committee, which includes government and development partners, oversees health service improvements. Key programs, such as the Immunization Programme, PMTCT, and the Integrated Management of Childhood Illness Programme (IMCI) have been launched. In 2022, over 9,000 health personnel were trained, and 1,867 midwives were deployed, with 30% of graduates being ethnic midwives to promote inclusivity in healthcare.

50. The National Strategy and Action Plan on RMNCAH 2021-2025 aims to improve maternal and child health outcomes by enhancing antenatal care, increasing skilled birth attendance, and promoting Early Essential Newborn Care (EENC) and Kangaroo Mother Care (KMC), which have reduced neonatal mortality. Between 2011 and 2023, there was a 42% increase in women delivering in healthcare facilities. The plan also strengthens maternal care, improves routine quality assessments, and builds public trust in primary healthcare, boosting vaccination and birth registration rates.

51. The Government has integrated reproductive health into the curricula of the University of Health Sciences and health science colleges, addressing issues like unintended pregnancies, early marriages, anemia among adolescents, and sexually transmitted infections. The Adolescence and Youth Development Strategy (2021-2030) focuses on reducing early marriage and teenage pregnancy, improving nutrition, and promoting reproductive health services and contraception. The National Plan of Action on Nutrition (2021-2025) targets malnutrition in women and children, while Decree No. 412/PM (2019) supports breastfeeding in line with the WHO Code.

52. Lao PDR ensures access to essential medicines and medical products at reasonable prices and of good quality, in accordance with the Law on Drugs and Medical Products and the Regulation on Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP). The MOH monitors and inspects the quality of drugs, taking strict action against violations. In recent inspections, 1,755 medical establishments were examined, resulting in the confiscation of 136 prohibited, expired, counterfeit, and unregistered drugs and the destruction of expired or deteriorated products.

6. Right to Education (Recommendations 115.145, 146, 149, 163, 177, 178, 179, 180, 181, 182, 183, 184, 185, 186, 187, 188, 189, 190, 191, 200)

53. Lao PDR prioritizes education as key to its socio-economic and cultural development. The Constitution guarantees the right to education (Article 38) and Lao PDR has enacted laws like the Law on Education and the Law on Higher Education. Key frameworks, such as the Education and Sports Sector Development Plan 2021-2025 and Vision 2030 guide future development. The Government, in collaboration with development partners, has implemented various projects, including the Education Quality Development Project, the Basic Education Development Project, and the School Nutrition Promotion Program.

54. From 2019 to 2023, the Government allocated 171,242 billion LAK for 21 education projects. In 2021-2024, the MOES signed the MOU with INGOs and CSOs in total of 75 projects with 62,913,834 US$, 1,764,922 EUR and 805,166 CHF. Furthermore, MOES was supported by the Official Development Assistance in education and sports sectors.

55. In the academic year 2023-2024, there were 185,329 students (92,565 females) enrolled in kindergartens, 740,084 students (359,956 females) in primary schools, 380,177 students (180,177 females) in secondary schools, and 155,147 students (73,884 females) in high schools. Furthermore, the academic year saw 84 public and private vocational education institutions under the technical oversight of the Vocational Education Department, MOES, with 2,315 teachers (905 women) and 18,353 students (6,156 females).

56. For the 2023-2024 period, two special education schools supported 178 students (130 females) with government-provided scholarships covering allowances and accommodation. Additionally, 25 ethnic boarding schools with 752 staff members (395 women) provided support to 10,389 students (4,708 females) with similar scholarships. The school lunch program, covering 17 provinces, 65 districts, and 3,451 schools, benefited 269,686 kindergarten and primary school students, supported by the Government, WFP, and other organizations. However, from 2019 to 2021, the portion of education budget against GDP decreased from 2.5% to 2.2% due to economic challenges and the COVID-19 pandemic.

57. In the 2023-2024 academic year, the Centre for Promoting Lao Language Reading, in collaboration with MOES, organized after-school training for Grade 1 students in 10 provinces across over 100 schools, training 16,140 teachers for the Spoken Lao Programme. The Ministry launched a mobile teacher project to support out-of-school education in remote areas and established a scholarship and allowance program to assist poor students, especially ethnic girls, in completing their education.

58. The Government has tasked the MOES with improving infrastructure to ensure equitable access to higher education. It is also prioritizing the enhancement of education quality through advances in teaching, research, and technology, with a focus on aligning human resources with labour market needs. The 4th National Plan of Action on Gender Equality and Mothers and Children in the education and sports sectors (2021-2025) aims to increase female participation in STEM fields, boosting employment and vocational training opportunities. The number of students enrolled in STEM fields has risen by 50%, and the Government targets graduating 20,000 students with STEM degrees, providing STEM training for secondary and high school teachers, with a focus on gender.

C. Rights of specific groups

1. Rights of women (Recommendations 115.57, 129, 192, 193, 194, 195, 196, 197, 198, 199, 209, 210, 211, 212, 213, 214)

59. The Government attaches importance to gender equality and the elimination of discrimination against women, as guaranteed in Article 37 of the Constitution. Laws such as the Law on Development and Protection of Women, the Law on Prevention and Combating Violence against Women, and the Law on Gender Equality support this commitment. The Government has approved important action plans, including the Fourth Five-Year National Action Plan on Gender Equality (2021-2025) and the Second Action Plan on Preventing Violence Against Women and Children (2021-2025). It has issued guidance on child labour prohibition, human trafficking, and victim protection. The National Action Plan on Gender Equality aims to promote women's leadership in the public sector by 2023. According to the 2024 Gender Gap Report, Lao PDR's gender equality index stands at 0.7, with improvements in economic opportunity, education, and health, though political empowerment remains lower (0.140).

60. The Government prioritizes women's capacity-building in leadership and management roles through a three-pronged approach: 1) training at educational institutions, technical colleges, NAPPA, and other similar establishments inside the country and abroad; 2) elaborate practical work and mass work in the grassroots process; 3) civil servant development through a leadership-management plan integrated with the human resource strategy, ensuring annual training in political theory, professional competencies, and experience. In 2023, 1,023 civil servants were trained, including 219 women (21.4%). Women now occupy key leadership positions, with 48.02% of civil servants being women. Notably, women hold 19% of Director General positions, 33% of Assistant Minister roles, and 21% of Minister roles. In the NA 9th Legislature, 21.95% are women, and women make up 30.48% of Provincial People's Assemblies. At local levels, women hold leadership positions: 5.5% of Deputy Provincial Governors, 3.44% of District Chiefs, 5.13% of Deputy District Chiefs, 3.3% Village Head, and 15% of Deputy Village Heads. Women also play a significant role in national defense, and diplomacy, with 3 female generals of the Armed Forces and 3 female ambassadors presently representing the Lao PDR abroad.

61. Lao PDR has actively promoted women's participation in national socio-economic development, focusing on protecting their rights and improving their living standards. The Government has integrated gender considerations into development efforts, advanced gender equality, and strengthened the legal framework. By removing barriers to women's participation, it has encouraged their involvement in business, reducing trading costs and improving business competitiveness. Women have also gained access to credit for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), benefiting 46,108 individuals, with women-owned businesses representing 48.37% of the total. These businesses are distributed across sectors: agriculture (28.54%), industry (49.80%), and services (59.70%).

62. Farmers are involved in SMEs, including farming, animal husbandry, and integrated agricultural production, across 121 districts, 1,217 villages, 3,082 groups, and 26,846 families, totaling 36,190 members, 18,256 women (50.45%). Additionally, 530 village nutrition groups have been formed, with 38,000 members, including 2,590 pregnant women and 1,587 mothers of newborns. The production units consist of goods, services, and manufacturing groups spread across 182 villages.

63. Since the adoption of Decision No. 649 on the Organization and Activities of Village Administration Organizations in 2016, the number of female village heads has increased. As of 2023, there are 8,371 village heads, 277 women (3.31%) and 8,094 men (96.69%). In addition, there are 24,144 deputy village heads, 3,630 women (15.03%). The Bank of Lao PDR is currently reviewing recommendations for the implementation of the Decree on Microfinance Institutions, which encourages the provision of credit to women nationwide. Between 2020 and 2023, financial institutions facilitated access to credit for women, totaling 9,375.43 billion LAK (31.30%) of the overall credit value of 29,953.05 billion kip.

64. To effectively address violence against women and girls, the Lao PDR has strengthened the capacity of staff providing victim services through collaboration among key

ministries, PSC, and LWU. A coordination committee at provincial and district levels ensures timely and appropriate assistance to victims. Additionally, a data collection and reporting system has been developed to track trends in violence, the types and frequency of abuse, and survivors' access to health, justice, and social services, informing future service improvements.

65. The Law on the Development and Protection of Women (2024), and Law on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of the Child (2023) prohibit the marriage for women under 18. Forced marriage of a child under 18 is a criminal offense, as specified in the 2017 Penal Code. Additionally, higher education institutions have integrated comprehensive sex education into their curricula, covering sexual and reproductive health, the prevention of STDs and HIV/AIDS, gender equality, children's rights, and safe use of technology, aiming to raise awareness, and prevent early marriages and unwanted pregnancies.

2. Rights of the child (Recommendations 115.25, 201, 202, 203, 204, 205, 206, 207, 208, 215, 216, 217, 218, 219, 220, 221)

66. Lao PDR has made significant progress in incorporating the CRC into national policies and laws, including Law on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of the Child (2023), Law on Lao Youth (2020), Law on Tobacco Control (2021), Law on Handling of Petitions (2022). Additionally, Law on Juvenile Criminal Procedure (2013) and Law on Prevention and Combating Cybercrime (2016) align with the Convention and its Optional Protocols, as well as UN Treaty Bodies' recommendations.

67. In 2023, Lao PDR amended the Law on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of the Child to comply with the CRC and its Optional Protocols, prohibiting all forms of violence against children, including abuse by civil servants, authorities, and caregivers. The amended Law also prohibits corporal punishment of children in all places and circumstances, such as at school and in the family. The country also implements key sub-laws to further protect children, such as the Decree on Legal Aid (2018), which assists disadvantaged children, including those with special needs, disabilities, and child victims. Other important sub-laws include those on labour dispute resolution, occupational safety, lifelong learning, national action plans for mothers and children, and the prevention of violence against children.

68. Lao PDR has prioritized developing training handbooks on child rights for individuals working with children, integrating child rights into curricula at institutions such as People's Police Academy, People's Public Security Academy, National Institute of Justice, and Prosecutor Research and Training Institute. The media sector updated its handbook on reporting children's issues (2021), while the mental health sector revised its guide on support for children and families (2021). The labour and social welfare sector developed handbooks on child protection and alternative care. National handbooks on child and youth participation, life skills, preventing violence, and professional training for children's services have also been created.

69. The second Five-Year National Plan of Action on the Prevention and Elimination of Violence against Women and Children (2021-2025) focuses on preventing violence in schools, ensuring safe educational environments, and strengthening efforts to address online violence, including sexual exploitation and child sexual abuse on social media. The plan promotes the implementation of laws to ban corporal punishment, create a violence-free school environment, and teach students self-protection skills. It also includes the "Care for Children" program, funded by the Government and international organizations, to promote appropriate childcare. Additionally, a national action plan is put in place to strengthen the child protection system, focusing on preventing all forms of violence and improving children's well-being.

70. Under the Labour Law, workers aged 14 to 18 can work up to eight hours a day, but they are prohibited from engaging in hazardous work, such as mining, working with chemicals, or night shifts. A total of 210 trainings on combating violence against women and child labour have been held, with 52,630 participants (39,179 women).

71. Article 15, Paragraph 2 of the Law on Family Registration mandates birth registration at district offices or Lao diplomatic missions abroad. The process has been modernized with

electronic data entry and individual code assignment in the family book. To ensure universal birth registration, especially in remote areas, the Government has implemented the National Strategy on Public Administration and Civil Statistics (2016-2025). By 2030, the MOHA will oversee civil registration, and the World Bank has allocated US$25 million (2020-2025) to improve the civil registration system. In 2020-2023, paper-based civil registration was recorded 73.4% of all registrations. Currently, there are 1,641,114 persons in the electronic civil registration system, including registering and issuing birth certificates for 1,017,473 persons, death certificates for 26,309 persons, and marriage certificates for 1,139 couples, divorce certificates for 78 couples.

3. Rights of persons with disabilities (Recommendations 115.222, 223, 224, 225)

72. The Law on Persons with Disabilities (2018) protects the rights of persons with disabilities. It aims to eliminate discrimination and promote self-reliance, full participation in society, and equality in various aspects of life, particularly Article 19 guarantees persons with disabilities, regardless of sex, age, social and educational status, belief, ethnicity, as well as causes of disabilities, are equal before the law, and in political, economic, social, cultural, family lives in accordance with laws.

73. Lao PDR has adopted the National Strategy and Program for Persons with Disabilities (2021-2030), integrated into the 2021-2025 Labour and Social Welfare Development Plan and the 9th NSEDP. The National Strategy specifies financial resources allocation from state budget, financial supports from international organizations, development partners, mutual funds, individuals, legal entities, and other fundraising activities. Additionally, the National Plan of Action for Persons with Disabilities allocates budget into programmes for implementation. Since September 2023, Lao PDR has launched pilot projects to provide 400,000 LAK monthly allowance for 497 children with disabilities (224 female) in Paek, Khoon and Phoukood Districts, Xiengkhouang Province. Up to the end of 2024, the total amount of provided allowance is 3,117,812,000 LAK.

74. The Government puts efforts on implementing policies, strategies, national action plans, as well as other related plans for persons with disabilities to allocate resources for MOLSW, MOH, MOES, MICT and MPWT. Furthermore, the Government adopted the Decree on National Committee for Persons with Disabilities, and issued the Ministerial Decision on the Establishment of the Coordinating Committee for Persons with Disabilities at the central level in 2023. The Coordinating Committee serves as the main coordinator with relevant sectors both at central and local levels, as well as development partners, and CSOs in monitoring, supporting, and evaluating the implementation of the Action Plan.

75. The Government promotes the inclusive participation of persons with disabilities in political, economic, and socio-cultural activities, such as access to social security, health insurance, rehabilitation, education and sports, vocational training and occupation, access to justice, public facilities accessibility, and services improvement for persons with disabilities. In addition, the Government has registered 9 associations and 4 service centers for persons with disabilities.

4. Social protection (Recommendations 115.144, 266)

76. Lao PDR adopted the National Social Protection Strategy in 2020 with visions, principles, and three objectives. The objectives include: (1) health insurance system with 5 activities under MOH, which provides primary health care service covering 94.5% of the total population; (2) social security system with 6 activities under the Lao Social Security Organization, MOLSW, which has beneficiaries and their families covering 11.8% of the total population; (3) social welfare system with 9 activities under MOLSW, MOES, MAF, has been further improved and developed, benefiting vulnerable and disadvantaged groups. In addition, the Government established the National Commission on Social Protection, which has its provincial branches.

77. Lao PDR has prioritized social protection in labour and social welfare by adopting laws and regulations that align with both national circumstances and ILO standards. The NA Legislative Plan for 2021-2025 includes the adoption of Law on Employment (2023), Law on Skills Development (2025), and Law on Social Welfare (2025). Additionally, the

Government plans to revise the Law on Social Security and the Law on Labour in the near future.

78. Relevant laws and regulations have been disseminated to workers and employers in businesses, production units, and service sectors across the country. Currently, there are 159 labour inspectors in total (32 women). In 2021-2023, labour inspectors conducted inspections across 5,036 labour units, covering 161,251 workers (63,718 women). During these inspections, 683 labour units were encouraged to develop and improve internal regulations, 292 labour units were urged to establish labour contracts, and 109 labour units were recommended to offer annual health checkups to their workers.

79. In 2021-2023, Lao PDR prioritized skills development, benefiting 48,599 individuals (42.73% women). This initiative helped 2,919 young people and women in remote, disadvantaged areas, including 2,014 women, improve their livelihoods. It also facilitated job creation for 276,581 individuals (46.68% women). The focus was on unskilled workers, career changers, the unemployed, and those entering new roles across 37 occupational fields, with 35,761 individuals (16,636 women) trained in agriculture, industry, and services, reaching 89.40% of the 5-year target.

80. In 2021-2024, a total of 189,314 foreign workers were employed (33,277 women). Of these, 89,284 worked in the industrial sector (11,478 women); 18,569 in agriculture (3,233 women); and 81,461 in services (18,566 women). In 2024, the number of Lao workers employed abroad increased to 224,376 (122,397 women). Specifically, 4,836 workers were employed in the Republic of Korea (1,026 women); 1,319 in Japan (499 women); and 218,221 in Thailand (120,872 women). The remaining workers were employed in other countries.

81. Since the 3rd Cycle UPR, the LFTU has received 147 labour dispute complaints from 3,477 workers (1,454 women), resulting in the recovery of 12,477,043,066 LAK in wages. Additionally, 903 informal workers (326 women), have received training on gender equality, mutual aid funds, fund management, bargaining, labour contracts, and key provisions of the Law on Labour and the LFTU Law.

82. In 2023, data was collected from 299,953 labour units, comprising 1,874,111 workers. Information on negotiations and collective labour contracts was gathered from 27 provincial trade unions, benefiting 23,475 workers (9,947 women). Efforts to promote individual labour contracts were made in 498 units, involving 5,976 workers (2,146 women). Informal labour groups were encouraged to establish mutual aid funds, with 5 groups and 313 members. Monitoring activities were conducted in three Migrant Labour Counseling Centers, with 350 awareness campaigns on safe labour migration and anti-human trafficking measures, reaching 397,714 participants (201,861 women). The Government increased the cost-of-living allowance by 900,000 LAK per month and raised the minimum wage for enterprise workers by 1,600,000 LAK. Notices on the minimum wage were issued 388 times, reaching 301,346 participants. A COVID-19 relief project provided basic living assistance to 2,550 families across 5 provinces, 30 districts, and 200 villages.

D. Ratification of international human rights treaties and the regional and international human rights cooperation

1. Adoption and Implementation of International Human Rights Treaties (Recommendations 115.6, 8, 9, 13, 19, 29)

83. Lao PDR has developed and strengthened its national institutional arrangements for the promotion and protection of human rights: the NCHR (replacing the then National Steering Committee for Human Rights Coordination) is mandated, among others, to promote human rights treaty ratification, implementation and reporting (ICCPR, ICESCR, ICERD, CAT), and to coordinate in the UPR process; the NCAWMC, tasked, among others, with promoting, monitoring, and reporting on the implementation of CEDAW, CRC, CRC-OP-SC, and CRC-OP-AC; and the NCPD, responsible for promoting, monitoring, and reporting on CRPD. In addition, the National Anti-Human Trafficking Committee addresses human trafficking issues. The NA Justice Committee receives and considers petitions for justice

from individuals. NA hotline (156) operates and accessible to individuals, and legal entities, and the public at large during both its ordinary and extraordinary sessions, while the PMO runs a hotline (1516) to receive requests from individuals. Other ministries and agencies, including the State Inspection Authority, the MOPS have also installed public opinion boxes to enable individuals to raise concerns, make proposals, and provide feedback on policy and legal issues. In the judiciary, the Administrative Chamber has been established since 2021 mandated to solve differences involving the rights and interests of individuals, including civil servants, vis-à-vis the official performance and conduct of public authorities.

84. While Lao PDR has not yet established a NHRI based on the Paris Principles, it has undertaken research and studies of the work and experiences of different models of NHRI. In fact, the Lao PDR's existing national institutions and mechanisms on human rights are indeed responsive to the needs and circumstances of the country. It is important to continue improving the efficiency of the existing mechanisms and arrangements.

85. Lao PDR is party to 12 ILO Conventions, including 7 fundamental conventions (No. C029, C100, C111, C138, C155, C182, and C187). Lao PDR is currently undertaking research and studies of other ILO conventions.

86. The Government continues to study the CPPED, signed in 2008, as well as the ICMW. Efforts to raise awareness and build capacity among central and local authorities regarding these two core human rights treaties are ongoing. In November 2024, two representatives from the Secretariat of NCHR participated in the Regional Dialogue on Enforced Disappearance in Bangkok, organized by OHCHR-SEARO. Furthermore, the Lao Government is also studying the optional protocols to human rights treaties.

2. Empowering human rights officials and promoting the understanding of human rights matters (Recommendations 115.37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 45)

87. Lao PDR has placed emphasis on promoting awareness of human rights among government officials and the general public, with the aim of instilling respect for fundamental human rights and enhancing the rule of law in the society. This includes focusing on strengthening the capacity and understanding of government officials responsible for coordinating human rights work across sectors, law enforcement officers, and other officials at both central and local levels. Furthermore, members of the NA, Provincial People's Assemblies, teachers, students, and non-profit associations are regularly engaged in these awareness-raising activities.

88. The Lao Government pays attention to capacity-building of officials in ministries and agencies through multiple avenues, such as participation in training programs, seminars, and dialogues on diverse human rights topics. Lao officials occasionally have had opportunities to participate in trainings and attend international and regional conferences on human rights, subject to available resources. Furthermore, Lao PDR has received technical and financial support from OHCHR, some other UN agencies, and other development partners, particularly Australia and the EU, to conduct human rights awareness-raising, capacity-building activities, and reporting skills, and also to enable Lao officials to have international exposures on human rights. Furthermore, human rights teaching and education is included as part of the curriculum of the Faculty of Law and Political Sciences of the National University of Laos, Faculty of Law of Champasak University, the National Institute of Justice, and NAPPA, which with the support of Australia is working to improve Human Rights Syllabus in its training programmes in politics and public administration attended by mid- and senior level government officials.

89. The MOFA has published a compilation of human rights treaties to which Lao PDR is party, as well as documents such as the Lao PDR's 3rd Cycle UPR, the POA, and a brochure on the UDHR. These materials are disseminated to ministries, NA, PSC, SPP, educational and research institutions, and other stakeholders both at central and local levels. In cooperation with development partners, including Australia, the EU, and UN, the MOFA has held workshops and seminars to raise awareness and capacity building on human rights, including right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, business and human rights for officials at central and local levels. The NCAWMC, NCPD, and a number of NPAs also organize seminars on human rights topics such as access to justice, rights of women, children

rights and persons with disabilities. To promote awareness, understanding, and respect for human rights among government officials and general public, the Government organizes annual commemorations of important events, including Human Rights Day, International Women's Day, Women's Union Establishment Day, International Labour Day, International Children's Day, International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, World Day Against Trafficking in Persons, and other occasions.

3. Human rights cooperation at international and regional levels and the engagement with the United Nations human rights bodies (Recommendations 115.28, 30)

90. Lao PDR dedicates its efforts and resources to implementing the recommendations from the 3rd Cycle UPR, alongside its obligations under the treaties to which it is party. This is carried out with the support and cooperation of the international community, including the OHCHR in Geneva and its Regional Office in Bangkok, as well as other development partners such as the United Nations Resident Coordinator's Office in Lao PDR (UNRCO), UN agencies (UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNWOMEN), LuxDev, ILSTA, the Lao PDR-Australia Human Rights Technical Cooperation Project Phase III (2023-2027), and the Lao PDR-EU Bilateral Cooperation Work Plan. Lao PDR maintains bilateral human rights dialogues with Australia and the European Union, and has bilateral exchanges on human rights promotion and protection with some other countries. In 2024, Lao PDR received a grant of US$ 40,000 from the Voluntary Fund for Financial and Technical Assistance to support the implementation of the UPR, in line with the national report preparation plan for the 4th Cycle UPR.

91. One of the most significant events demonstrates in the first ever visit in June 2024 of the current UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to Lao PDR at the invitation of the Government. During the visit, the High Commissioner met and exchanged with Lao leaders, including the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the Vice President of the NA. He also met with the Special Envoy of the ASEAN Chair 2024 on Myanmar, the Representative of Lao PDR to AICHR, and the Foreign Ministry Department of Treaty and Law which also serves as the NCHR Secretariat.

92. Lao PDR has actively engaged in the ASEAN framework for the promotion and protection of human rights, encompassing cooperative policy planning, and the implementation of human rights cooperation programs across the three pillars of ASEAN Community-building. In 2024, Lao PDR assumed the ASEAN Chairmanship, including the chairmanship of AICHR. Lao PDR was involved in the drafting of the ASEAN Declaration on the Right to a Safe, Clean, and Sustainable Environment. Additionally, Lao PDR led the ASEAN Thematic Study on the Right to Peace, which was completed in 2024. In December 2024, as Chair of AICHR and with the support of Australia, Lao PDR organized the AICHR Regional Workshop on Best Practices for Implementing UPR Recommendations, with the participation of human rights officials and experts from ASEAN members states, Australia and OHCHR. Additionally, AICHR Regional Workshop on Sharing the Best Practices on Implementation of the Treaties to Which all ASEAN Member States are parties is planned to be organized in March 2025 in Lao PDR. Lao PDR also actively participates in the cooperative frameworks of other ASEAN Human Rights Bodies such as ACWC, ACMW, etc.

93. Lao PDR continues to engage with UN human rights mechanisms, including those under the UNHRC and Treaty Bodies. In 2020-2024, Lao PDR submitted the Initial Report under ICESCR in December 2022; the 10th Periodic Report under CEDAW in March 2023; and the 7th Periodic Report under CRC and its two Optional Protocols in July 2024. In addition, Lao PDR participated in the dialogue on the Initial Report under CRPD in August 2022, submitted Responses to the CEDAW Committee's List of Issues in April 2024, and took part in the dialogue on the 10th Periodic Report under CEDAW in October 2024. Furthermore, in October 2024, Lao PDR submitted Responses to Recommendations 20, 38, and 40 issued by the UN Human Rights Committee regarding its Initial Report under ICCPR and also responded to the List of Issues raised by the CESCR. Lao PDR is currently finalizing its Initial Report under CAT and is initiating the preparation of the 19th -25th Combined Periodic Reports under ICERD.

94. Lao PDR has maintained cooperation with the Special Procedures under the UNHRC. From 19 to 29 November 2024, at the invitation of the Lao Government, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Field of Cultural Rights has visited the country, meeting with high-level government officials both at central and local levels, including visits to some villages as well as with other stakeholders. Lao PDR has engaged with other mechanisms of the UNHRC, participating in the meetings of the UNHRC and the UNGA 3rd Committee. The Government attaches importance to providing information, replies, and clarifications to questions and inquiries raised by UN Human Rights mechanisms. Notably, thanks to the consistent cooperation of the Lao Government, on 30 October 2023, the Working Group on Situations of the Complaint Procedure of the UNHRC decided to dismiss its consideration of Communication case 252, among others.

IV. Difficulties and challenges

95. Shortly after its participation in the 3rd Cycle UPR in early 2020, Lao PDR, like other countries in the world, was gravely affected by the spread of COVID-19 pandemic. This led to the imposition of health and safety measures, including restriction on certain human rights. Lockdowns, self-quarantine, restriction of movement, gatherings, and other preventative measures inevitably impacted the enjoyment of human rights, causing hardships for individuals and impeding their ability to carry out normal daily activities.

96. Lao PDR has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the volatility of the global economy and other challenges, causing economic and financial difficulties for the country, which include unprecedented high inflation, fluctuations in exchange rates, and rising commodity prices, which have in turn increased the costs of living and exacerbated the burden of providing public services to the people.

97. The UXO remains a critical obstacle to socio-economic development in Lao PDR. The presence of UXO directly affects people, particularly the exercise of their right to development and other human rights.

98. In recent years, Lao PDR has been severely affected by natural disasters such as floods and droughts, and has been faced with the increasing impacts of climate change. At the same time, budgetary constraints have made it difficult for the Government to provide essential public services, particularly in remote areas.

99. Lao PDR has faced a shortage of specialized personnel to carry out human rights activities effectively. Many government officials both at the central and local levels still lack a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of human rights. This poses a challenge in effective coordination of human rights activities, including writing national reports under treaty bodies and UPR.

V. Priorities, commitments and assistance needed

A. Priorities:

100. Continue to develop the economy and society in accordance with the priority areas outlined in the periodic national socio-economic development plans, action plans, and other strategic frameworks, aiming to achieve the set development objectives. This includes efforts towards LDC graduation and creating conditions that allow the people to enjoy improved living standards and fully exercise their human rights.

101. Continue to concentrate all efforts on strengthening the Rule of Law and People's Democracy. These efforts aim to ensure that the Lao multi-ethnic people can effectively exercise their human rights, the fundamental freedoms under the Constitution and laws in line with the Lao PDR's international human rights obligations and commitments.

102. Continue to raise awareness and understanding of the Constitution, national laws, human rights treaties to which Lao PDR is party, and UPR recommendations among civil servants at central and local levels, stakeholders, and the general public. Additionally,

recommendations under the UPR and UN Treaty Bodies will be implemented through laws, plans, and programs, ensuring the involvement of all sectors of society in their implementation.

103. Continue to prioritize the promotion and protection of the human rights of vulnerable groups, including women, children, persons with disabilities, and the elderly.

104. Prioritize capacity-building of the concerned officials and the human rights focal points both at central and provincial levels on writing national reports under treaties and UPR.

B. Commitments

105. Continue to enhance and develop the domestic legal framework to ensure the effective protection and promotion of human rights in accordance with the Constitution and laws, ensuring compliance with the country's obligations under international human rights treaties to which Lao PDR is party, thereby maximizing the betterment of human rights for the multi-ethnic people of the Lao PDR.

106. Continue to implement the pledges made during the High-Level Event commemorating the 75th anniversary of the adoption of UDHR (Human Rights 75 High-Level Event). These commitments include fulfilling the overdue reporting obligations under CAT and ICERD, submitting its national reports under UPR, and promoting gender equality.

107. Continue to engage with the UNHRC and its mechanisms, including the Special Procedures, as well as with the UN Treaty Bodies. These efforts aim to strengthen the promotion and protection of human rights while fostering better understanding of the international community about human rights implementation in Lao PDR. The Government continues to promote human rights cooperation within ASEAN and bilateral frameworks to exchange good practices and experience in human rights promotion and protection.

108. Continue to implement the national socio-economic development plan, addressing poverty and implementing SDGs in cooperation with development partners. This includes efforts, among others, to address UXOs and to create conditions that enable Lao people to continually improve their living standards.

109. Continue to disseminate the Constitution, laws, human rights treaties to which Lao PDR is party, UPR and Treaty Bodies recommendations, and other relevant information on human rights among officials both at central and local levels, and other stakeholders.

C. Assistance needed

110. To advance its priorities and fulfill its obligations and commitments in the promotion and protection of human rights, Lao PDR requires assistance from development partners to support the Government's efforts in implementing human rights activities more effectively and efficiently. This includes addressing the need to meet its reporting obligations under UPR and the human rights conventions to which Lao PDR is party.

111. Enhancing capacity-building for the officials of the secretariats of the national committees/commissions on human rights, rights of women, children, and persons with disabilities, as well as human rights focal points within ministries, agencies, and provinces. This effort includes strengthening their capabilities in the promotion and protection of human rights, as well as data collection, tracking database, preparation of national reports on human rights, and participation in regional and international conferences.

112. Lao PDR requires technical assistance, and adequate human and financial resources to successfully implement the recommendations to be received and accepted by the Lao Government as a result of the 4th Cycle UPR.